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**DCS Commissioner Receives "Public Official of the Year" Award
Tennessee Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers Honors Viola P. Miller**

Nashville, TN - Tennessee Department of Children's Services Commissioner Viola P. Miller has received the 2004 Public Official of the Year Award from the Tennessee Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. The organization bestowed the honor in recognition of Miller's efforts to improve services for Tennessee's children.

The organization surprised Miller with the award during its conference, held at the Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville on October 15, where she was the keynote speaker.

"Commissioner Miller has demonstrated a strong commitment to the importance of ensuring that every child in Tennessee has a right to a permanent, continuous and nurturing relationship in their life," said NASW-TN president Bo Walker during the presentation. "Under her direction, the Department of Children's Services is bringing a focus back to the needs and support systems required for children and families to be successful in their environment. Commissioner Miller's dedication and perseverance to the children of the State of Tennessee is truly appreciated."

Commissioner Miller felt honored to receive the award. "It is invigorating and humbling to receive positive recognition for my life's work - the pursuit of making lives better for children. I am dedicated to improving the lives of children in Tennessee and am working diligently to lift them up," she said.

The Public Official of the Year Award is presented annually in recognition of outstanding service and contributions of a public official who has showcased leadership in the formulation of public policy, particularly policies that affect social justice, healthcare, education, social work practice, and civil and human rights.

According to NASW, a number of studies have documented the critical connections between training, competency and child welfare services. The organization expressed appreciation to Miller for using such experience-based research in her work and recognizing the critical role trained social workers play in positive outcomes for children in Tennessee, particularly in forming the multimillion-dollar, 13-member university consortium effort to provide training for the DCS case managers for the next five years.

Middle Tennessee State University was awarded the contract, which is worth up to \$16 million in its first year and renewable annually for five years - making it the largest single contract that MTSU has ever been granted. The immediate goal of the university's newly created Tennessee Child Welfare Training Center (TCWTC) is to engage the members of the 13-school Tennessee Social Work Education Consortium (TSWEC) in transitioning DCS's current training procedures to the soon-to-be implemented regional training programs that have social work as their emphasis.

"We commend Commissioner Miller for stressing the importance of a qualified child welfare workforce and bringing social workers back into the public child welfare workforce," Walker said. "Her initiative and leadership in forming a new university training consortium will have a positive impact on the lives of Tennessee's families for years to come."

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services was established to provide the best possible care for children and youth who are in state custody, or at significant risk of entering custody, and their families. Services provided by DCS include child protective services, foster care, adoption, programs for delinquent youth, probation/aftercare, and treatment and rehabilitation programs for identified youth.

A headshot of Commissioner Miller can be requested by e-mailing K. Danielle Edwards at K.Danielle.Edwards@state.tn.us

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